

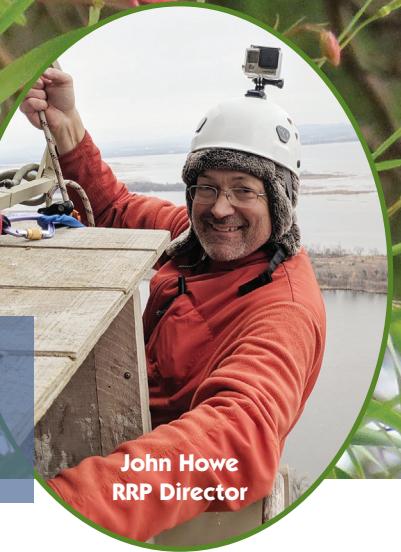
Raptor Resource Project News

Winter 2019
Volume 3 • Number 1



Peregrine falcon "Lefty" at RedBird Bluff

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



John Howe
RRP Director

It's my pleasure to present this newsletter. For over 30 years, the Raptor Resource Project has played a pivotal role in the reintroduction and monitoring of the Midwest peregrine falcon population. From their beginnings in 1988 to the present, our raptor monitoring and banding programs play an important role in understanding the stability of the peregrine falcon population and potential issues or threats. RRP volunteers enhance our programs, contributing many hours to nest site monitoring, live cam operation, and public raptor education initiatives. Landowner partners, students, and the public help drive our programs and are also its beneficiaries. We invested extra effort in our bald eagle-based Education in Action program this year, building on its prior success. That program continues to gain participants across the country and benefit from the expertise of teacher practitioners who have used it as a model teaching tool.

Whether it was falcons, eagles, or kestrels, this year was dominated by effects of the black fly and flood conditions along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Black flies led to early abandonment of our eagle nests at Decorah and Decorah North, and our lone falcon male, Carson, at Great Spirit Bluff. It was interesting that many sites were not affected by the black flies, indicating variable outbreaks along different watersheds. We visited 35 sites and banded 69 young falcons and two adult falcons and are excited about potential activity at Effigy Mounds National Monument 20 years after the historic two-year release of cliff-hacked falcons there at Hanging Rock. It would

be a monumental occasion to see a productive nest and band peregrine falcons there in 2020! I encourage you to look over our annual report, which can be found here:

<https://raptorresource.org/pdf/2019BandingReport.pdf>

2019 was a year of renewal for our eagle nests in Iowa. We all had the opportunity to observe a mate changeover at each nest —Decorah Male 2 (DM2) at the Decorah nest and Decorah North Female (DNF) at the Decorah North nest. The successful adoption of our man-made eagle nest at Decorah North was a major accomplishment and marks the second successful eagle nest building project we have undertaken. Both DNF and DM2 have returned to their respective nests in late 2019 and it appears that we will have two active bald eagle nests to observe and enjoy in 2020.

I'll end with a mention of the resiliency of our American Kestrels in SW Wisconsin and the Great Spirit Bluff falcons. Despite an incredible number of black flies, the WI kestrels successfully fledged four young. Carson at GSB survived a great horned owl attack, but fell early from the nest and black flies. He was tended by his dedicated parents at the bluff base and survived on the ground for 16 days before flying back up the cliff to spend the summer with us. Here's to a productive year ahead with more success stories to share!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: What a Journey!



It was in 1987 that Bob Anderson talked with me about founding the Raptor Resource Project. From the very beginning it was a resource. Peregrine Falcons were being bred for release into the wild. In a few years, peregrines were colonizing city buildings and power plant, smoke stacks throughout the Midwest. It was hoped they would cross over to nest on the Mississippi River bluffs, their historical territory. Urban nest site imprinting was preventing this. In 1996 the project moved to North East Iowa, where peregrines were bred and released on a Mississippi bluff in 1998 and 1999. The success of this program was seen in the first year of the new millennium, Peregrines were nesting on the river bluffs for the first time since the decimation of populations by DDT. Throughout this period we were visiting groups and schools. Spreading the word that a little effort can make a difference.

To date, we have live webcams observing the domestic lives of peregrines, eagles and other birds. We now have the Mississippi River Flyway cam recording migratory activities on one of the most important flyways on the planet. One of our goals has been

to bring an understanding of raptors and our natural world into homes and schools across our planet. We now have an education committee headed up by our hard-working vice president Laura Johnson. At this time teaching templates and curricula, surrounding our webcams, are being formulated and will be available for all schools to use.

In the New Year we will be forming an exploratory committee to review the possibilities of a reintroduction of the swallow-tailed kite back to the upper Mississippi and environs. This bird was extirpated from the area by habitat destruction in the latter half of the 19th century. That habitat has grown back. We believe that it may be possible to return this magnificent bird of prey to where it once flew.

Currently the project is being served with distinction by our Director John Howe and webmaster Amy Ries. They in turn are supported by their families to whom we are most grateful. We didn't realize back in 1987 where the project would go or how it would grow. Bob would be proud of our accomplishments and all the followers around the world, who with their support, have made this all possible. We hope to gather your continued support as there is much yet to achieve and the more support we get, the more we're able to do. I like to say these days, remember to look after your planet!

TEACHER'S CORNER...

Lori Carnes – 2nd Grade Teacher

Educating the public regarding raptors, their natural history, behavior, habitat needs, and conservation issues is a primary mission of the Raptor Resource

Project and was a passionate interest

of RRP founder Bob Anderson. The RRP staff and board understand that our streaming cameras provide a window into the lives of raptors that can stimulate and inspire people of all ages to learn more about these fascinating birds.

Since the early days of the first Decorah Eagle camera broadcasts, teachers have been building curriculum around the nest cams as their classrooms watch the eagles build nests, lay and incubate eggs, and raise generations of eaglets right in front of them. Teachers find that eagle-based lessons engage, stimulate, and inspire students regardless of the subject involved. RRP has formed an Education Committee to provide educational resources to teachers through lesson plans, teacher-to-teacher chat rooms to share ideas and sample lessons, and moderators who work specifically with classrooms in an interactive real time manner. Lori Carnes and Deb Ripple, who have developed curriculum and classroom activities around our nest cams, are on the committee, as are Emily Neal (the Assistant Director at Luther's Center for Sustainable Communities) and retired Decorah teacher Meg Storkamp.



Lori Carnes shared some of the creative ways she has built lessons based on the Decorah eagle nest for her second-grade classes:

"The students have Bald Eagle journals. One section is a glossary of eagle words. When we see things on the web cam, such as an eagle feaking its beak or rousing, we put it in the glossary section of our journals. For instance, we identified 'feak' as a verb, the students came up with a definition, we wrote the definition on the board using their kid words, and I projected a picture of it. They entered the word, part of speech, and the definition and sketched a picture of it in their journals.

"In math I integrated the nest with geometric solids. Nests come in four solid shapes: cone, bowl (half of a sphere), cylinder, and disk (a shorter cylinder). I provided pictures of the nest that showed all of these and we sketched them in our journals. We followed the lesson up by building model nests and identifying which solid shape their nests were.

"Older students can do more sophisticated math, science, data collection and analysis based on the web cams and teachers can integrate geology, history, literature and writing—the sky is the limit when such a compelling subject as the eagles and other web cam raptors are sharing the classroom!"

Teachers are entrusted with our future—the students whom they influence and inspire every day in their classrooms. We honor their dedication, commitment and incredible hard work and hope to assist and encourage them as they help their students thrive, succeed, and become the conservationists of the future.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Peregrine Falcon Banding



Banding falcons in
Lake City, Minnesota

Bird banding is defined as the practice of catching a bird, fixing an identifying band around its leg, and releasing it. Since 2000, the Raptor Resource Project has banded over 1,200 nestling peregrine falcons at 50 locations. We visit sites, capture nestling peregrines by hand, band them, and return them to their nests. Our territory stretches from Minnesota Power's Clay-Boswell plant near the headwaters of the Mississippi River south to Bellevue, Iowa and east to Peoria, Illinois: over 500 miles as the falcon flies and considerably further by car! Our field season starts in late February or early March. We spend weeks finding peregrine pairs, observing their behavior, locating their eyries, and getting band numbers if we can: a process that requires long days in the car and multiple visits to every eyrie we find. Each individual falcon usually completes her laying cycle in six to eight days, but falcons in general start laying eggs from late March through early May, which means that banding begins in late May and continues through late June or early July.

What does falcon banding look like? Depending on the site, two or more of us will take an elevator, climb, or rappel to reach a nest. We capture the fluffy white falcon nestlings by hand, making sure to handle them carefully and keep them from jumping or falling from the nest. It's important to hold falcons securely, but we can't damage blood feathers, compress a falcon's chest too tightly, or yank on its legs. While the holder controls the falcon's wings, legs, and feet, the bander puts a federal aluminum band around its right leg and an auxiliary color band around its left leg. Larger female birds take bigger bands, so we need to carefully assess tarsus thickness, footpad size, overall size, and the pitch of a peregrine's voice to determine which size band it should get. We don't close and lock the band until we're sure it fits: loose enough to rotate



Banding day in
St. Paul, Minnesota

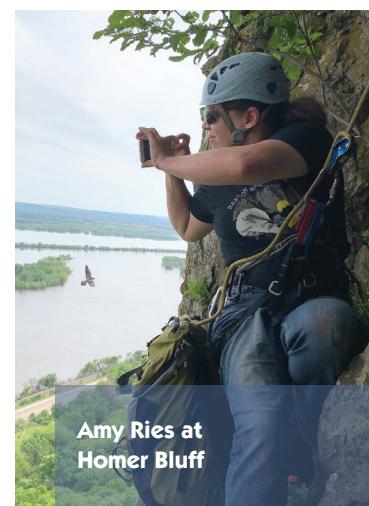


Dave Kester
on rope

around a falcon's tarsus, but not loose enough to leave a large gap between band and leg or slip down over its foot.

Fieldwork is great fun, but our banding season doesn't end when we band the last bird! Data must be reported to the federal Bird Banding Laboratory, Midwest Peregrine Society, state DNR's, and other banders. Landowners and industrial partners want to hear about their birds. Forms must be filled out, reports written, permits submitted, follow-up surveys done, and paperwork filed. We band falcons between late May and early July, but activity related to banding happens year-round.

We sometimes get asked why we band peregrine falcons. Banding allows us to study the movement, survival, and behavior of the falcons we band, yielding information about mortality rates, dispersal patterns, migration, behavior, social structure, and seasonal and long-term population trends. Banding lets us track individual falcons, giving us an intimate look at how a species behaves as it recovers, grows, and reaches stasis with its environment. Without banding, we could not track the success of the peregrine recovery program, know the history of any given site from year to year, or track the ebb and flow of peregrine populations. Watching nests reveals a great deal of information about the behavior of individuals. Banding populations lets us learn about the challenges those individuals face, how bird species are doing overall, and how to manage and care for birds on a rapidly changing planet. Why are we banding? We are banding for the birds!



Amy Ries at
Homer Bluff

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Brice Prairie Conservation Association and the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

2019 was a great year for our Flyway Cam as 180,000 people watched pelicans, swans, cranes, eagles, herons, egrets, ducks, and many other birds as they foraged, paddled, swam, squabbled, and migrated through Pool 7 on the Upper Mississippi River. We wouldn't have had this amazing experience without our partners at Brice Prairie Conservation Association and the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.



The Brice Prairie Conservation Association (BPCA) was founded in 1958 to support conservation projects in the lower Black River area of SW Wisconsin. Like many home-grown organizations, it is small in size, but very big in heart. Its dedicated members work hard to provide resources and funding for projects that include restoring prairie and oak savannah, controlling purple loosestrife, creating fish and duck habitat, cleaning the Black and Mississippi Rivers, maintaining wood duck and bluebird boxes, and improving boat landings and water safety. They also played a key role in installing and maintaining the Flyway cam by providing boats, sweat equity, expertise, and materials for camera and power pole installation. They provide invaluable serving as water-taxis and technical assistants when we need to access and maintain the system. We often talk about making a difference. Brice Prairie Conservation Association is an outstanding example of people coming together to make a difference for the place they lived in and love.

The Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (UMNWFR) was established by Congress in 1924 as a refuge for fish, wildlife and plants and a breeding place for migratory birds. The refuge covers four states: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois along the Mississippi River and encompasses one of the largest blocks of floodplain habitat in the lower 48 states. Bordered by steep wooded bluffs that rise 100 to 600 feet above the river valley in the scenic Driftless Area, the refuge offers scenic beauty and productive fish and wildlife habitat unmatched in the heart of America. The refuge is designated as a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar) and a Globally Important Bird Area.

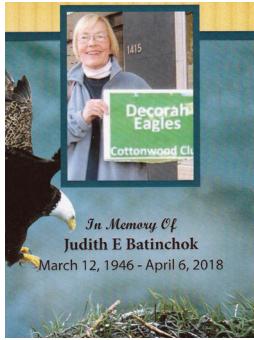
We worked with the UMNWFR La Crosse District for the Flyway Cam project on Pool 7. On any given day, you might find District staff working on water level management, water quality improvement, island building, bank stabilization, bird and vegetation surveys and monitoring, waterfowl banding, and invertebrate sampling. They were instrumental in getting the Flyway Cam project started, approved, and donated staff expertise along the way. The pontoon helped us get the poles to the island and staff helped float and carry the poles all the way in. Their water taxi services helped as we finalized the project and got everything online. The live cam is currently displayed at the visitor center and now streaming on-line to share with the world!

We want to thank the Brice Prairie Conservation Association and the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge staff for all their help making this project a success. We are inspired by all they've done to make a difference!

LEAVING A LEGACY...



We are both proud and honored to have received two significant bequests in the past year along with many others. Many devoted Decorah Eagles followers express in their own special way what a difference being able to watch “their eagles” has made in their lives. Whether it be a family or personal request to donate to RRP or a formal bequest, these thoughtful gifts have a profound impact on how we deliver on our mission. We are very thankful for donations to help us carry out what we do. What is a bequest? It is the act of giving or leaving something by will. A synonym is—Legacy. We are honored to share a little bit of information about two Decorah Eagle followers who wanted to make a difference:



Judith Batinchok, also known as GigglePup, was an avid Eagles watcher. She would watch daily as the eagles brought great joy to her daily routine, especially during her last few years. This donation (her bequest) was her way of saying “Thank You” for providing service to all the present and future eagle watchers out there. You can see from the attached photo and the smile on her face, that she was a proud member of the “Cottonwood Club”!

Janice Bosworth was an RRP Decorah Eagles Moderator and loved the eagles. Jan loved her role as a volunteer, working with her fellow Mods, and especially the chatters. She got along with everyone and was always greeted with love from the chatters. Her commitment was unwavering, and she is missed!

We are very honored that Judith and Janice chose to support the Raptor Resource Project in this way. We know from so many letters and accounts from Decorah Eagle followers that the excitement and joy of watching them raise their young and just “be eagles” is a motivational factor to get up every day. It is humbling to know that bringing the Decorah Eagles and our other raptors to the public can have such a lasting impact on people’s lives, friendships, and families. *If you are interested in leaving a lasting legacy, contact our planned giving representative and Board member Jeff Worrell (phone: 651-212-3026; email: jeffw@raptorresource.org).*





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ROBERT ANDERSON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Our first scholarship recipient was chosen this year and the scholarship was awarded to Luther Senior Sean McKenzie. Sean is a senior environmental studies and political science double major. It is exciting that we will soon be funding our second scholarship recipient coming up in 2020!

The Robert Anderson Memorial Scholarship Fund was created to honor Bob's passion for raptors and to support local students on their way to environmental conservation careers. The Raptor Resource Project has partnered with the Winneshiek County Community Foundation and Luther College to deliver scholarships to selected Luther College students. Gifts are received through contributions, bequests, charitable trust remainders, and other gifts directed to the Fund. Students will be selected on criteria including demonstrated concern for the environment through positive environmental activism and community involvement or independent studies related to environmentalism. Donations are welcome! To make donations to the fund, contact the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa at 319-287-9106 or go to: cfneia.org/robert-anderson-scholarship



**Bob at Minnesota Power's
Clay Boswell Plant**

This newsletter was made possible by a generous grant from explore.org – Thank You!

We would like to thank our many partners...

Landowners	Winneshiek County Community Foundation
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